

Chapter 05

USDA Forest Service Wildland Fire and Aviation Program
Organization and Responsibilities

Introduction

This handbook is intended to be a program reference guide that documents the standards for operational procedures and practices for the USDA Forest Service Fire and Aviation Management program. The standards provided in this handbook are based on current agency and interagency wildland fire management policy, and is intended to provide fire and aviation program guidance and to ensure safe, consistent, efficient, and effective fire and aviation operations. This document will be reviewed and updated annually.

Foundational Doctrine

The following collection of principles and beliefs form the foundational doctrine for fire suppression in the U.S. Forest Service. These principles and beliefs operate at multiple organizational levels, including:

- Forest Service Wide (i.e., apply to all employees and activities)
- Fire and Aviation Management (i.e., are specific to the fire and aviation management program)
- Fire Suppression (i.e., are specific to fire fighting activities).

The Operational Environment

Fire Suppression

1. No resource or facility is worth the loss of human life, however the wildland fire suppression environment is complex and possesses inherent hazards that can— even with reasonable mitigation— result in harm to fire fighters engaged in fire suppression operations. In recognition of this fact, we are committed to the aggressive management of risk.

Mission

~~Forest Service Wide~~

~~The Forest Service is prepared and organized to support national and international emergencies with trained personnel and other assets when requested.~~

Forest Service Wide

2. The Forest Service is prepared and organized to support national and international emergencies with trained personnel and other assets when requested.

3. Agency employees respond when they come across situations where human life is immediately at risk or there is a clear emergency, and they are capable of assisting without undue risk to themselves or others.

Forest Service Wide

4. In responding to emergencies, we will bring the same professionalism and passion for safety as we do to non-emergency situations.

Forest Service Wide

5. Support for local fire emergencies takes priority over accomplishment of local resource targets. Support of non-local fire emergencies will be at the discretion of the local line officer, as bounded by agency agreements and Regional or National direction.

Forest Service Wide

6. A cooperative relationship between the Forest Service and other agencies is essential. The Forest Service is committed to honor its part of the joint responsibility to develop and maintain effective working relationships with its intergovernmental cooperators.

Fire & Aviation Management

7. Fire management is central to meeting the Forest Service mission – conserving natural resources, restoring ecological health, and protecting communities.

Fire Suppression

8. Successful fire suppression is essential to support the Forest Service mission.

Fire Suppression

9. The intent of wildfire suppression is to protect human life, property, and at risk lands and resources.

Leadership and Accountability

Forest Service Wide

10. The hallmarks of Forest Service leadership are action, attitude, and accountability.

Forest Service Wide

11. Leaders express clear and concise intent to ensure assignments are managed safely, effectively, and efficiently.

Forest Service Wide

12. Leaders regularly monitor operations for effectiveness, and take action when there is recognition of exceptional or problematic employee performance.

Forest Service Wide

13. Both positive reinforcement and discipline will be based on individual behavior as measured by: adherence to the rules; appropriate application of

1 doctrine, principles and guidelines; execution of responsibilities commensurate
2 with role; and appropriate use of available information.

3 Fire Suppression

5 14. Demonstrated fitness for command is a requirement for leadership positions
6 associated with fire fighting.

12 Roles and Relationships

13 Forest Service Wide

15 15. Commitment to duty, respect for others, and personal integrity are expected.
16 Every employee fosters a work environment that is enjoyable, rewarding,
17 recognizes the value of diversity, and is free of harassment.

18 Fire Suppression

20 ~~Every Forest Service employee has a responsibility to support fire suppression~~
21 ~~emergencies in a manner that meets identified needs, and is within their~~
22 ~~qualifications and capabilities.~~

23 Fire & Aviation Management

25 16. Line officers with fire management responsibilities will have knowledge and
26 understanding of fire program management.

28 17. Contracted resources will meet identified standards for qualifications,
29 training, productivity, and efficiency necessary to meet emergency response
30 needs.

31 Fire & Aviation Management

33 18. It is the Forest Service responsibility to initiate and participate in public
34 education efforts to promote support for necessary fire management activities.

35 Fire Suppression

36 19. Every Forest Service Wide

38 ~~Line officers with fire management responsibilities will have knowledge and~~
39 ~~understanding of fire program management-employee has a responsibility to~~
40 ~~support fire suppression emergencies in a manner that meets identified needs,~~
41 ~~and is within their qualifications and capabilities.~~

42 Operations

43 Forest Service Wide

20. Employees are expected and empowered to be creative and decisive, to exercise initiative and accept responsibility, and to use their training, experience, and judgment in decision-making to carry out their leader's intent.

Forest Service Wide

21. Employees are expected and empowered to make reasonable and prudent decisions to accomplish the agency mission while minimizing exposure to hazards.

Forest Service Wide

22. Clear, uncomplicated plans and concise orders maximize effectiveness and minimize confusion.

Fire Suppression

23. When it is time to fight fire, we do so in a manner that maximizes effectiveness of effort, has highest regard for firefighter and public safety, and controls costs.

Fire Suppression

24. Every fire suppression operation is directed toward clearly-defined, decisive, and obtainable objectives.

Fire Suppression

25. Command and control must be decentralized to cope with the unpredictable nature of fire. To achieve their leader's intent and accomplish operational objectives, subordinate commanders are required to make decisions on their own initiative, and to coordinate their efforts.

Fire Suppression

26. Unity of effort is maintained and suppression actions are coordinated at all times.

Fire Suppression

27. Using principles requires judgment in application, while adherence to rules does not. In combination, principles and rules guide our fundamental wildland fire suppression practices and behaviors, and are mutually understood at every level of command.

Fire Suppression

28. Rapid deployment and concentration of fire suppression resources at the decisive time and place is essential to successful fire suppression actions.

Fire Suppression

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1 29. Maintaining high capability for initial attack is essential to public and fire
2 fighter safety, accomplishment of management objectives, and cost containment.

3
4 Risk Management

5
6 Fire Suppression

7 30. We practice risk management to minimize the exposure and affects of the
8 inherent hazards in fire suppression while maximizing the opportunities to
9 achieve leader intent.

10

Agency Administrator Positions

The Forest Service Director of Fire and Aviation Management, the Director of Human Resources and the Forest Service Line Officer Team have developed core fire management competencies for inclusion into the position descriptions and in selection criteria for agency administrators. They are presented here for reference.

Evaluation Criterion

Knowledge of fire program management including ability to integrate fire and fuels management across all program areas and functions; ability to implement fire management strategies and integrate natural resource concerns into collaborative community protection and ecosystem restoration strategies; knowledge to oversee a fire management program including budget, preparedness, prevention, suppression, and hazardous fuels reduction; ability to serve as an agency administrator during an incident on an assigned unit; and ability to provide a fully staffed, highly qualified, and diversified firefighting workforce that exists in a "safety first" and "readiness" environment.

Training and Core Competencies

Attend a regional or national "Fire Management Leadership for Agency

Administrators" training session.

Require a shadow assignment with a fully qualified agency administrator.

Receive training or experience in the Wildfire Situation Analysis (WESA) and

Wildland Fire Implementation Plan (WFIP).

Provide a Delegation of Authority to Incident Commanders.

Line Officer Certification Program

The following principles will guide certification of agency administrators in fire management:

Regional Foresters are accountable for certification of line officers

Line officer evaluation includes standards for training, background and

experience, and demonstrated ability, which will result in a qualitative

evaluation of readiness by the Regional Forester

When the complexity level of a fire exceeds a line officer's certification, a coach

will be assigned to advise (but not replace)

This certification program will be periodically evaluated and updated as needed

Decision Support Groups may be requested and would be assigned as fire costs

approach certain thresholds

The Coaching/Shadowing program, to be administered by each Region, is an

integral part of this certification program

Line Officers will be evaluated in three basic areas

Training

1 Background and experience

2 Demonstrated understanding of concepts and principles

3
4 This certification program is a multi-level process where line officers
5 demonstrate competence in one of three levels of managing fires. Those levels
6 would be Working, Journey, and Advanced.

7
8 Guidelines

9 In consideration of the appropriate level (Working, Journey, and Advanced) to
10 assign a line officer, the Regional Forester should consider the following
11 guidelines:

12 For individuals that do not meet at least the Working Level, a coach will be
13 assigned to support that line officer in managing Type3 or higher wildfire
14 incidents.

15
16 Working Level - The line officer could manage a low to moderate complexity
17 fire and Fire-Use fire. The line officer should meet the following:

18 Training: Fire Management Leadership or National Fire Management for Line
19 Officers, and WFSA Certification (FSM 5130)

20 Background and Experience: Successful management of a minimum of one
21 Type 3 or higher fire, or one successful higher complexity fire (Type 2I or
22 higher) quality shadow assignment (consider complexity and size of the fires).

23 Management oversight of a low-complexity fire program and/or experience as
24 an agency administrator or representative. Applicable experience in all-risk or
25 other incident oversight may be considered in lieu of this experience, as well as

26 Fire-Use experience. Consider career fire experience

27 Demonstrated Ability: Successful evaluation by a coach (including feedback
28 from ICs or ACs) that the candidate has demonstrated understanding and
29 application of the responsibilities of an agency administrator on smaller low-
30 complexity fires with a basic understanding of the elements of the core
31 competencies

32
33 Journey Level - The line officer could manage a moderate to high complexity
34 fire. The line officer needs to be certified at the Working Level and should meet
35 the following:

36 Training: Fire Management Leadership or National Fire Management for Line
37 Officers, and WFSA Certification (FSM 5130).

38 Background and Experience:

39 Successful management of a minimum of one Type II or higher fire, or one
40 successful higher complexity fire (Type I) quality shadow assignment,
41 depending on fire experience (complexity and size of the fires should be
42 considered).

43 Management oversight of a moderate-complexity fire program or experience as
44 an agency administrator or representative on Type II or higher fires.

45 Applicable experience in all-risk or other incident oversight may also be
46 considered in lieu of other guidelines, as well as Fire-Use experience.

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Demonstrated Ability: Successful evaluation by a coach (including feedback from ICs or ACs) that the candidate has demonstrated understanding and application of the responsibilities of an agency administrator on moderate to large complex fires in the core competencies, and other elements that may be relevant.

Advanced Level - The line officer could manage a high complexity fire. The line officer needs to be certified at the Journey Level and should meet the following:

Training: Fire Management Leadership or National Fire Management for Line Officers, and WFSA Certification (FSM 5130).

Background and Experience:

Successful management of a minimum of 5 Type I or II fires (at least one of which is a Type I fire), depending on fire experience (complexity and size of the fires should be considered).

Management oversight of a moderate to high-complexity fire program.

Applicable experience in all-risk or other incident oversight may also be considered in lieu of other guidelines, as well as Fire-Use experience.

Demonstrated Ability: Successful evaluation by a coach (including feedback from ICs or ACs) that the candidate has demonstrated understanding and application of the responsibilities of an agency administrator on large complex fires in the core competencies, and other elements that may be relevant.

Other Considerations

Core competencies, consistent with Fire Doctrine principles, include:

Safety

Strategies and tactics for Cost Containment

Incident Management Processes

Understanding of decision support tools

Situational Awareness of resource availability & allocation

WFSA/WFIP

Monitoring and Evaluation of fire operations

Risk Management

Social/Political awareness and interpersonal relations

Other Training Opportunities to Achieve Core Competencies - Additional

Training Opportunities/Suggestions (will be updated as program is evaluated)

Upper levels of Fire Leadership and Fire Management courses

Be the actual line officer in the Type III IC certification sand table exercises

Develop a "graduate-level seminar" on advanced risk management

The Fire Management for Agency Administrators course needs a curriculum

revision (Currently the national and regional courses are redundant)

Get assigned to a Type I or Type II team as a training assignment (e.g. shadow Plans) and see the world from their viewpoint

Assist in 420 simulation as a line officer

WFSA and WFIP training

- 1 Include risk management and fire management topics to annual line officer
2 meetings
3 Attend staff rides (staff rides need to include a stand that portrays the line officer
4 perspective)
5 Prescribed fire training centers
6
7 Guidance on the Selection of Coaches
8 Coaches can be current or former line officers. The Regional Forester
9 determines the level of certification for which a coach is qualified.
10 Criteria for individuals serving as Coaches are as follows:
11 Must be a "Journey" level line officer in dealing with large fire incident, or rated
12 at an experience level commensurate with incident being managed. Present and
13 past Agency Administrators can serve as coaches, including retirees that were
14 qualified/experienced.
15 Is willing and able to serve as a Coach.

16
17 Performance Standards

- 18 Add the following standards to the existing performance standards for Forest
19 Supervisors and District Rangers under Performance Standard #4, Leadership,
20 Coaching, and Supervising:
21 ☐ Integrate fire and fuels management across all functional areas.
22 ☐ Implement fire management strategies and integrate natural resource concerns
23 into collaborative community protection and ecosystem restoration strategies on
24 the unit.
25 ☐ Manage a budget that includes fire preparedness, prevention, suppression, and
26 hazardous fuels in an annual program of work for the unit.
27 ☐ Perform duties of agency administrator and maintain those qualifications.
28 ☐ Provide a fully staffed, highly qualified, and diverse workforce in a "safety
29 first" environment.

- 30
31 These standards are based on current policy and provide program guidance to
32 ensure safe, consistent, efficient, and effective Fire and Aviation Operations.
33 This document will be reviewed and updated annually.

34
35 Specific Agency Administrator Performance Standards for Fire and Aviation at
36 the Field Level

37
38 Preparedness

- 39 ☐ Take all necessary and prudent actions to ensure firefighter and public safety.
40 Ensure sufficient qualified fire and non-fire personnel are available to support
41 fire operations at a level commensurate with the local and national fire situation.
42 Ensure accurate position descriptions are developed and reflect the complexity
43 of the unit. Individual Development Plan promote and enhance FMO currency
44 and development.

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Provide a written Delegation of Authority to FMOs that provides an adequate level of operational authority at the unit level. Include Multi-Agency Coordinating (MAC) Group authority, as appropriate.

Identify resource management objectives to maintain a current Fire Management Plan (FMP) that identifies an accurate level of funding for personnel and equipment.

Develop preparedness and fire use standards that are in compliance with agency fire policies.

Management teams meet once a year to review fire and aviation policies, roles, responsibilities, and delegations of authority. Specifically address oversight and management controls, critical safety issues, and high-risk situations such as transfers of incident command, periods of multiple fire activity, and Red Flag Warnings.

Ensure fire and aviation preparedness reviews are conducted each year.

Meet annually with major cooperators and review interagency agreements to ensure their continued effectiveness and efficiency.

Convene and participate in annual conferences and fire reviews.

Agency administrators, Fire Program Managers, and/or Safety and Health Program Managers shall conduct after action reviews on all Type 3 fires and a minimum of 10% of their unit's Type 4, and 5 fires and document their inspections in the incident records.

Suppression

Ensure use of fire funds is in compliance with Agency policies.

Wildland Fire Situation Analysis (WFSA) is completed and approved on all fires that escape initial attack. Alternative evaluation and certification requirements are followed.

WFSA's that are expected to exceed \$10,000,000.00 in suppression costs are forwarded to the Regional Office for review and approval.

Management reviews are conducted on all fires that require a WFSA.

Personally attend reviews on Type 1 and Type 2 fires.

Provide incident management objectives, written delegations of authority, and a complete agency administrator Briefing to Incident Management Teams.

Evaluate the need for resource advisors for all fires, and assign as appropriate.

For all unplanned human-caused fires where responsibility can be determined, ensure actions are initiated to recover cost of suppression activities, land rehabilitation, damages to the resource, and improvements.

Safety

Review safety policies, procedures, and concerns with field fire and aviation personnel.

Ensure timely follow-up actions to program reviews, fire preparedness reviews, fire and aviation safety reviews, and management reviews.

Monitor the fire situation and provide oversight during periods of critical fire activity and situations of high risk.

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- 1 ☐ Ensure there is adequate direction in fire management plans to maintain fire
2 danger awareness.
3 ☐ Take appropriate actions with escalating fire potential.
4 ☐ Ensure appropriate investigations are conducted for incidents, entrapments,
5 and serious accidents.

6 7 Fire Use

- 8 ☐ Ensure an approved burn plan is followed for each prescribed fire project,
9 including follow-up monitoring and documentation to ensure management
10 objectives are met.
11 ☐ Ensure that a Wildland Fire Implementation Plan (WFIP) is completed and
12 implemented for all fires managed for resource benefits.
13 ☐ Provide management oversight by personally visiting wildland and prescribed
14 fire activities each year.
15 ☐ Ensure compliance with National and Regional Office policy and direction for
16 prescribed fire activities and ensure that periodic reviews and inspections of the
17 prescribed fire program are completed.
18 ☐ Approve Prescribed Fire Plans. Authority may be delegated to the agency
19 administrators as provided under specific directions.
20 ☐ Review Prescribed Fire Plans and recommend or approve the plans depending
21 upon the delegated authority. Ensure that the Prescribed Fire Plan has been
22 reviewed and recommended by a qualified technical reviewer who was not
23 involved in the plan preparation.

24 25 Fire Management Positions

26 The following lists show the minimum operational experience recommended for
27 fire management positions. The Interagency Fire Program Management
28 Qualifications Standards will be used as guidelines in conjunction with specific
29 agency requirements when filling vacant fire program positions, and as an aid in
30 developing Individual Development Plans (IDPs) for employees.

31 32 33 34 35 Specific Fire Management Staff Performance Standards for Fire Operations at 36 the Field Level

37 38 Preparedness

- 39 ☐ Maintain “safety first” as the foundation for all aspects of fire and aviation
40 management.
41 ☐ Ensure that only trained and qualified personnel are assigned to fire and
42 aviation duties.
43 ☐ Develop, implement, evaluate, and document fire and aviation training
44 program to meet current and anticipated needs.

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- 1 Establish an effective process to gather, evaluate, and communicate
- 2 information to managers, supervisors, and employees. Ensure clear concise
- 3 communications are maintained at all levels.
- 4 Ensure fire and aviation management staffs understand their roles,
- 5 responsibilities, authority, and accountability.
- 6 Develop and maintain an open line of communication with public and
- 7 cooperators.
- 8 Regardless of funding level, provide a safe, effective, and efficient fire
- 9 preparedness and fire use program.
- 10 Organize, train, equip, and direct a qualified work force. An Individual
- 11 Development Plan (IDP) must be provided for incumbents who do not meet new
- 12 standards. Establish qualification review process.
- 13 Take appropriate action when performance is exceptional or deficient.
- 14 Ensure fire and aviation policies are understood, followed, and coordinated
- 15 with other agencies as appropriate.
- 16 Ensure that adequate resources are available to implement fire management
- 17 operations.
- 18 Provide fire personnel with adequate guidance, training, and decision-making
- 19 authority to ensure timely decisions.
- 20 Develop and maintain agreements, annual operating plans, and contracts on an
- 21 interagency basis to increase effectiveness and efficiencies.
- 22 Develop, maintain, and annually evaluate the FMP to ensure accuracy and
- 23 validity.
- 24 Ensure budget requests and allocations reflect preparedness requirements in
- 25 the FMP.
- 26 Develop and maintain current operational plans. (e.g., dispatch, pre-attack,
- 27 prevention).
- 28 Ensure that reports and records are properly completed and maintained.
- 29 Ensure fiscal responsibility and accountability in planning and expenditures.
- 30 Assess, identify, and implement program actions that effectively reduce
- 31 unwanted wildland fire ignitions and mitigate risks to life, property, and
- 32 resources.
- 33 Work with cooperators to identify processes and procedures for providing fire
- 34 safe communities within the wildland urban interface.

35 Suppression

- 36 Ensure completion of a job hazard analysis (JHA) for fire and fire aviation
- 37 activities, and implement applicable risk mitigation measures.
- 38 Provide for and personally participate in periodic site visits to individual
- 39 incidents and projects.
- 40 Utilize the incident complexity analysis to ensure the proper level of
- 41 management is assigned to all incidents.
- 42 Ensure incoming personnel and crews are briefed prior to fire and aviation
- 43 assignments.
- 44 Coordinate the development of the Wildland Fire Situation Analysis (WFSA)
- 45 with local unit staff specialists for all fires that escape initial attack.

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- 1 ☐ Ensure effective transfer of command of incident management occurs and
- 2 safety is considered in all functional areas.
- 3 ☐ Monitor fire activity to anticipate and recognize when complexity levels
- 4 exceed program capabilities. Increase managerial and operational resources to
- 5 meet needs.
- 6 ☐ Complete cost recovery actions when unplanned human-caused fires occur.

7 Safety

- 9 ☐ Ensure work/rest and R&R guidelines are followed during all fire and aviation
- 10 activities. Deviations are approved and documented.
- 11 ☐ Initiate, conduct, and/or participate in fire management related reviews and
- 12 investigations.
- 13 ☐ Monitor fire season severity predictions, fire behavior, and fire activity levels.
- 14 Take appropriate actions to ensure safe, efficient, and effective operations.

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15 Fire Use

- 17 ☐ Ensure a written, approved burn plan exists for each prescribed fire project.
- 18 ☐ Ensure all escaped prescribed fires receive a review at the proper level.
- 19 ☐ Provide the expertise and skills to fully integrate fire and aviation management
- 20 into interdisciplinary planning efforts.
- 21 ☐ Effectively communicate the “natural role” of wildland fire to internal and
- 22 external agency audiences.
- 23 ☐ Ensure compliance with National and Regional Office policy and direction for
- 24 prescribed fire activities and ensure that periodic reviews and inspections of the
- 25 prescribed fire program are completed.

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